

The Plateau

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Everyone has challenges in their life. Those challenges may also be referred to as hurdles. These hurdles or challenges must be overcome to achieve something that we desire. In most cases, this is something new or something of importance to us, to give us the energy to work hard enough to overcome any challenges or hurdles. Martial arts are very similar in their ranking systems, with testing and promotion in grades or Kyu.

Many people join the martial arts for one reason and stay for a completely different reason however, one factor usually is the same ... the desire to achieve a certain rank. For most, it is black belt. For others, it is Shihan or higher. Regardless of your goal, there can be many challenges to overcome. There are the commitments to training, getting to the Dojo, clearing your mind, listening carefully to instruction, and giving your 100 % every class to better understand the art and to condition both your mind and body for the tasks at hand. There can be extra workouts with other students, to better hone your skills and practice, until it becomes natural. Now, I will share with you the point of this article.

Above I wrote, "...until it becomes natural". That feeling of making it natural may appear at different stages and levels, similar to testing, and just like the ranking system. Many times, practitioners will already have a certain level of natural ability, either from another martial art, or other training, or just being a natural at martial arts. That natural ability can be both a blessing and a curse. It can be a blessing for the first few years of training, because it seems to all come together nicely for you. It can also be a curse because up until a certain point, you don't have to train yourself as hard in methodology, and you can just rely on your natural abilities.

Once a certain level is achieved (and this level is different for everyone), you may start to feel like you are stuck in a rut or hit a plateau (See the definition below).

Plateau; pla·teau n

a hill or mountain with a level top

a period or phase in something when there is little increase or decrease

a phase in mental or physical development during which little headway is made

Typically, one will use the same training methods in hopes of achieving different (or higher) results. It is at this time, that a practitioner should be able recognize that in order to become something you have never been (higher rank), you need

to do things that you have never done (train differently). Therefore, there is a need for a change in one's perspective of their training.

As a martial artist, training and goal setting are very important. Any natural abilities present, will only take us so far and then we need to open up our mind to suggestion or instruction on other methods of learning or training. There will always be hurdles throughout different phases of our training. Some we can control, and others that we cannot. Factors such as; work, family, other hobbies, other commitments, and other goals, will always surface. How we overcome those factors, hurdles, challenges, or the plateau, and find our balance, is up to us. Attitude is a big factor that has the most influence and it is the one that we have the most control over. If our attitude is positive, productive, and goal oriented, we can achieve great things while maintaining a balance in our lives.

In closing, taking the time to reflect on our goals and our barriers will help us to adjust our training methods and our attitude, to find that balance which we are looking for, to go beyond the plateau. Natural abilities will only take us so far and then we will have to learn how to train differently to accomplish different and desired results. Life can be busy and demanding. Most of us know a man who was a law enforcement officer most of his life, worked shift work, traveled, had a family including five daughters, and still made time to learn and pass his training onto others. Soke LaMonica is an inspiration to us all and has set a great example.

Regardless of what your challenges are, you can find balance in your training and life, even when you feel you have hit the plateau, if the desire is strong enough. The plateau isn't just a physical state, but it can be a mental state of mind as well. Our perspective or attitude can play an important role in overcoming the plateau. Remember, obstacles are those things we see when we take our eyes off our goals.